

Media, PA— Mental health treatment, housing, education, and job and business opportunities were just some of the issues addressed during a session hosted by Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), who assembled about a dozen Veterans under the age of 30. During the two and half hour roundtable at Delaware County Community College, the Congressman, with his staff and representatives of the Philadelphia and Coatesville VA Medical Centers, reviewed efforts to assist young Veterans and listened to their concerns. The 110th Congress has taken important actions to improve treatment of men and women who have served our country, including substantial increases in funding for the Veterans Administration and housing programs, as well as financial support for post-secondary education; however, the VA still has a 400,000 case backlog and there is a high number of instances of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and homelessness among returning Veterans. —

“I am proud of the important measures that I have supported in the House to improve the quality of life for our Veterans, including the passage of the largest funding increase in the history of the VA and legislation to guarantee a post-secondary education for our Vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Congressman Sestak. “In addition to these accomplishments, though, it is critical that those who have worn the cloth of this nation are able to have an open dialogue with their government to ensure that we meet their needs.”

The Congressman spent part of the meeting discussing ways to make certain that Veterans have access to an affordable education, and explaining the provisions within the new GI Bill, which guarantees a full college education for men and women who have served three years on active duty in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. The government will pay for four years of education up to the level of the most expensive in-state public school. In addition, servicemen and women who have at least three months on active duty since September 11, 2001, including those in the National Guard and Reserve, are also given the ability to collect education benefits.

In regard to Veteran-owned businesses, the Congressman mentioned the Small Business Contracting Program Improvements Act (HR 3867), which includes a provision requiring that any small business owned by a service-disabled Veteran receive a sole source federal government contract if the firm is otherwise qualified to provide the good or service at a reasonable price, eliminating the process of competitive bidding for applicable government contracts in favor of awarding contracts to businesses owned by those injured while serving our country.

“What I heard today, and what will become integral to my workforce development initiatives, is

that the young men and women returning home want a good job and the benefits necessary to support their families," said Congressman Sestak. "That has to be our local and national focus and I will engage my Workforce Development and Veterans Advisory Committees in actions to identify job opportunities for Vets."

Today's discussion continued a series of events in which the Congressman has participated to speak with Veterans and those responsible for their care. Last month he toured the VA hospital in Philadelphia to meet with the Director and discuss the assistance his staff needs to provide appropriate care, particularly for the increasing incidences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Soon after, Congressman Sestak visited the Coatesville facility, where he announced that he is pursuing legislation to reverse income limits that have prevented certain categories of Veterans from qualifying for health benefits.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.*

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